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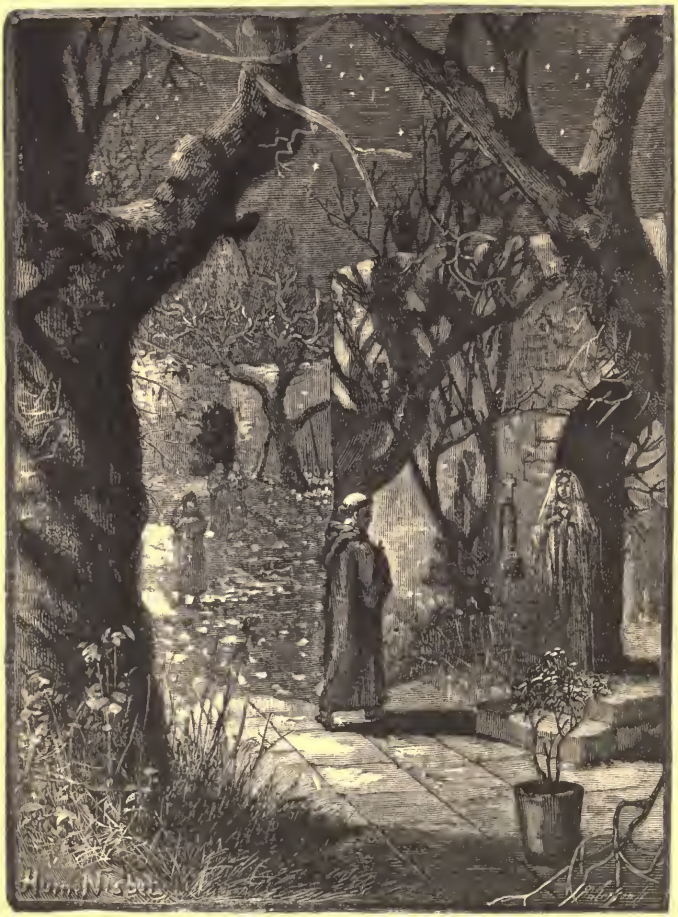
THE MATADOR.



"The moonbeams strike against the wall,
They lie cross-patched upon the floor."

[Page 65.

THE MATADOR

AND

OTHER RECITATIVE PIECES

BY

HUME NISBET

Author of "Memories of the Months," etc.

London: 1893.

HUTCHINSON & CO.

34, *PATERNOSTER ROW.*

PR
5110
H3M6

Dedicated

TO THE ONE

WE LOVE SO DEARLY,

H. K. N.

When leaves were green and lilies spread,
Where Love then stood a crownèd Queen ;
Spring to the summer sun was wed
When leaves were green.

Love sighing 'neath an ebon screen,
While stars were scattered overhead,
And all worth life lay couched between.

This hour is draped in grey and red ;
Love idly moans o'er what has been,
Beside a bier of wishes, bred
When leaves were green.

87252

PREFACE.

BEFORE the altar of Kali, the Destroyer—*i.e.*, the mystic goddess of modern criticism—I meekly come to lay my present offering of vile words, with myself, so that she may crush me if she is disposed, the while that I honour her condescension, wisdom, and unerring perception of the good and evil, the weak and the strong of this earth, who are brought before her august judgment-seat and—quenched.

Oh, great Kali! the thirsty spouse of Savi, can I honour thee more than by prostrating myself and offering my miserable efforts to thee, while I implore thee to crush me and them into pulp?

For then, oh, rare goddess! I may hope to live

in the future, sanctified by the weight of thy condescension, and purified by thy fierce breath, as the lives and offerings of those who have gone before have been crushed, so that they themselves might live after they have been sacrificed to the deities of their times.

Sweet Kali, walk over thy worshipper. Great Kali, behold him at thy feet a wretched but devoted slave. Dread Kali, he is dumb while he waits.

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THE MATADOR.

THE MATADOR.

I.

KEEP her back, oh, holy Father,
While I whisper in your ear.
Though I love her, I would rather
That my words she did not hear.

II.

Do you think that I am slaughtered?
For if dying I'll confess.
Yet I've oft before been battered,
And the pain is growing less.

III.

Oft before have I been mangled,
Yet the doctor shakes his head,
And my thoughts seem more than tangled;—
All the world is growing red.

IV.

I can see the smiles I courted
While the stupid bull stood tame,
Till the gaudy sash I sported,
To arouse his eyes to flame.

V.

Bend down closer, holy Father,
Can you grant me peace to die?
Keep her back, for I would rather
Not *yet* look within her eye.

VI.

I have sinned, and I regret it;
Yet that golden orange time,
Could I in my grave forget it,
Or the cursed, madman crime!

VII.

One that drifted from the Rhine-land,
With two pale-blue eyes, and hair
Like yon wisp of straw, the twine-band
Holding up her baby there.

VIII.

Bend down closer, she is nearer,
And I would not have her know
How that Gretchen was the dearer,
Or the end of that love woe.

IX.

She was pure until I met her,
It was I who made her bend ;
She was fond had I but let her,
Fond and steadfast to the end.

X.

All that harvest-time we courted ;
She was easy led, and young,
I self-pleased, and so we sported
Like two kittens, played and sung.

XI.

Ah ! those pale-blue eyes, those tresses,—
See them gleaming over there ;
That white neck,—the small hand presses
O'er the ugly gash when bare.

XII.

Holy Father, I 'twas did it,
And the gentle devil lied
When she to the judge, to hide it,
Made a story up, and died.

XIII.

She was lavish in her plenty,
Free and gracious with her smiles ;
Sunned the world,—just under twenty,
Guileless in her little guiles.

XIV.

I, all jealous, grudged the sharing
With my kind that graciousness ;
Took to watching and comparing
Others whom she seemed to bless.

XV.

I was jealous—ah ! you fear me,—
Jealous, and without a cause.
How these raging demons tear me,
Who thus slid 'tween Justice' claws !

XVI.

Why?—How can we tell what moves us,
When this foeman sacks the heart?
Why we doubt the thing that loves us?
Chance a word will fling the dart.

XVII.

Yes, I think it was the jeering
And vain boasting of a boy,
Whom she laughed with, nothing fearing,
In the fulness of her joy.

* * * * *

XVIII.

Father, surely night is falling,
And my heart is numb and sick.
Shrive my sins, for she is calling;
Something tells me to be quick.

XIX.

This is Seville, with its fountains,
And its walls upon the plain,
Cooled by breezes from the mountains,
Sweet, pure airs which soothe all pain.

XX.

And it winds, broad Guadalquivir,
To Cordova, where we met.
She was sailing down the river—
Fresh that first sweet glance comes yet.

XXI.

She had come from Barcelona,
By the sea, and I from Jaen.
No—not Gretchen, but the Donna:
Yes, I learnt to love again.

XXII.

Learnt to love as man loves woman,
Learnt to feign a joy unfelt,
Not as first—not beast, nor human
Heart can melt, and melt, and melt.

XXIII.

Yet we must have something near us,
Or these thoughts would drive us mad;
And a woman best can cheer us.
You have what I never had,—

XXIV.

A clear conscience, sanctifying
All your hours of lonely life.
I was satisfied with buying
Rest beside a faithful wife.

* * * * *

XXV.

Is this Seville? Let's begin it,
It is but a paltry scratch;
Stuff my scarlet sash within it,
And stand ready for my catch.

XXVI.

Are they waiting, fair signoras?
We have won too oft to fail;
There lows not a bull can gore us.

* * * * *

Ha! *she* leans against the rail.

XXVII.

Murdered Gretchen, watching ever
With her love-glance pure and sweet,
As she looked by Guadalquivir,
When she fell dead at my feet.

XXVIII.

Ever near me in my sleeping,
Ever by me day and night ;
Only for a moment keeping
From me in the heat of fight.

XXIX.

Gretchen ! Gretchen ! ! She is bending
O'er me, with her balmy breath,
All-forgiving, condescending,
Mine,—still mine in life and death.

XXX.

Golden tresses, softly streaming,
Blue eyes shining through bright tears.
Is it death ? Or am I dreaming
Back a dream of vanished years ?

* * * * *

XXXI.

Golden ! How they seem to darken,
And the blue eyes grow to brown ;
While her moans, as now I hearken,
Are not in the voice long known.

XXXII.

Yet a face I have had closer
In my waking and my sleep.
Ah! the fair maid, shall I lose her?
Why, oh, Father, does she weep?

* * * * *

XXXIII.

Wife, ah! it seems growing denser.
Are we kneeling side by side
While the church-boys swing the censer?
Her I loved—No! not my bride.

XXXIV.

Father, we were never married,
She was slain before that came.
Damnèd fool, had I but tarried!
'Twas my fault, she had no blame.

XXXV.

Gretchen! what is that beside you?
Is't a baby? Mine or his?
Mine? Ah, no! Whate'er betide you,
I had not that share of bliss.

XXXVI.

What is that you two are saying?
I am raving?—No! 'tis truth.
Dying? Yes, while you are praying
Pray for one who died in youth.

XXXVII.

For what seemed this life without her,
She who made God's sun to shine?
Madman that I was to doubt her:—
Full as well doubt Christ divine.

* * * * *

XXXVIII.

Bend down closer, holy Father,
Let me kiss His cross, and rest.
Bring my wife, and bid her gather
My poor child close to her breast.

XXXIX.

Ah, she brought me faith and beauty,
And I gave her what I had;
I have tried to do my duty,
I am not all vile and bad.

XL.

One last kiss, and one last blessing,
One last prayer,—then save your breath.
I have finished my confessing :
Pardon grant, I fear not Death.

XLI.

Bring her nearer. All my sorrow
Is to think of you to-day,
And what you will be to-morrow
Weeping o'er my dead, cold clay.

XLII.

Take this blood-drenched sash, and fold it
Round our little one,—be brave,—
When I am not there to hold it,
Bring it sometimes to my grave.

XLIII.

Hush your moans : I feel Death's shiver.
Dig my grave close to the brink
Of the broad, clear Guadalquivir,
I will lie, and hark, and think.

XLIV.

It is rolling to Cordova,
Past the Gardens on to Jaen;
From my love on—on to love. Ah!
Donna,—Gretchen: past all pain.

ABU KLEA.

ABU KLEA.

I.

WAIT till I tell you what our lads have done
Out in the Soudan. Try to picture it:
A constant furnace-blast, a flaming sun,
Tongues caked, and eyeballs bloody with the grit;
Fagged with the heavy labouring knee-deep
Through fine sand, near red-hot, and worn with want of sleep.

II.

Say, have you ever tried, in dreams, to climb
A steep, rough mountain with some doom behind,
Running a race with death the bet and time
Helping the hunters; with tired knees and mind
All on the strain, with nerves a-rack, and brain
Near at the bursting, and heart bulged with utter pain?

III.

If what you took to be the sunset grew
A peak, not half way up, and in the chase,
Where you expected succour, there stood two
For every one behind, and held the place
Against your life, not sanctuary,—then
You may in part begin to comprehend these men.

IV.

Those mighty sons of heroes on that plain,
Dreaming of rest after the day's hard march;
Their souls aweary with fatigue and pain,
Their hearts hard-tensioned, and with throats a-parch,
Dreaming of sleep and wells of water clear,
The only thought which served that desert march to cheer.

V.

Checked in the moment of their worst fatigue
With the appalling tidings of the foe
In force, by rumour rendered ten-fold big,
Holding their place of shelter this to know,
That they must fast another night, and watch
Against surprise. We have not much like this to match.

VI.

The Light Brigade! yes, but they went in fresh,
Not worn to death like these brave boys; just feel
How easy 'tis to rush with buoyant flesh
Into the charge with steel to ring on steel;
How diff'rent to resist with flesh relaxed,
While nature calls a halt, and should no more be taxed.

VII.

How they have done it, with a loss of some,
Our best and bravest, but they did it well;
From older wars dead heroes here may come,
And revel in that rain of shot and shell.
Ten thousand Arabs launched against a square
Of fifteen hundred, not a craven spirit there.

VIII.

All through the night, beneath that crescent horn
And those same wondrous stars, below whose light
Great crowds have passed, and from dead nations torn
Lost liberty,—ah! many a bloody sight
Have those same stars looked down upon serene,
As they looked down that night in that far desert scene.

IX.

With now and then a shot, and here and there
A spirit gone from out the ranks close-knit,
But wakeful all until daylight laid bare
Those hard-edged, dark, low hills, now copper-lit,
Over a small eternity of sand,
Rich ochre-tinted, round that isolated band.

X.

Up to the battle, be their numbers ten
Or twenty thousand. Forward, though men fall
Each moment, ghastly gaps filled up with men
Who march with slow and steady pace, though all
Can feel it coming, feel the heavy shot
Blatter from dense clouds mixing with the sunbeams hot.

XI.

Forward, and clouds grow thicker; they agree
That army must be full ten thousand strong,
Rushing with turbans; foaming like a sea
Uplifted 'gainst a little rock,—a throng
Of brave fanatics with their fierce war cries,
Borne o'er the sounds of shot, thirsting for Paradise.

XII

They rush past walls of flame, which constant mow
Down hundreds, but fresh hundreds those replace ;
None think of flight, each dies a dauntless foe,
While smoking guns blot out the white sun's face,
Volley o'er steadfast volley, streams of blood,
And crashing thunders ; with the sand now purple mud.

XIII.

Blood in the air and brains, men fired and bled,
With wounds unheeded, bullet holes unfelt
Or noticed, save those killed outright, the dead
Were utilised by that front rank who knelt
On yielding limbs, a raised-up barricade
Of death, all lately life, their short-sight markings made.

XIV.

Blood in their brains, yet nothing like dismay,
And little of disorder, as they bore
That fearsome charge, the onslaught of the day,
Breaking of that great square so firm before,
A mighty army crushing in a few,
Who grappled fast, as only British soldiers do.

XV.

Bayonet and spear, steel when lead had failed;
Tired fists, no longer tired, gripped hard at throats,
While shell and shot and bullets constant hailed,
As wounded camels shrieked their shrill high notes;
The greatest went in that smoke-veiled melée,
English and Arab, brothers all in bravery.

XVI.

And this is what our gallant lads have done,
Raised o'er the Pyramids a monument
To British pluck. We name no woman's son
Before another's in that army sent
To free the hero we had watched with gloom
For months, all patient in his prison of Khartoum.

XVII.

The weakest there has now become a peer
Of chivalry, the strongest is no more:
We sit at home and feel for them the fear
They feel not for themselves; each drop of gore
Is gilt with thrilling pride to us who call
Those gallant fifteen hundred heroes, brothers all.

ISANDULA.

ISANDULA.

"FIX bayonets, and die, as English soldiers do,—
Shoulder to shoulder, the enemy around;
Shut out hope of mercy, but keep your colours true,
Raise a pile of death, as evidence when found."

This the terse, stern order that last rang in their ears:
Blind with the fury, the fear, or what you will,
Dazed all they glared in front, yelled their English cheers;
Saw heaving waves of night; knew they had to kill;

Knew that their hour was come, knew that they had to fall,
Ground close their chatt'ring teeth, took each vacant place;

Thirty to one the foe, each rushed a giant tall,
Swinging his grisly corpse—frightful shields to face!

But still they faced it, raw young schoolboys mostly there,
Stabbed when the bullets failed, took as well as gave;
Sold every drop of blood, piled up in the air
Sable monuments around each English grave.

Devils desecrate the slain, raging through the camp,
Black foe and white mingle in the trampled mud;
Down sinks a sickened sun; Night lifts up her pale lamp,
Trailing silver threads 'tween mounds of dead in blood:

Lighting up two dauntless boys who had glory gained—
Coghill and Melville—the colours twisted round,
Who rode through hell that day bearing them only stained
With their red hearts' blood, now sinking in the ground.

So were they all met next morn when their comrades came :
No tongues to spoil it, but marks of deeds that told
How they had worked that day. Oh, deathless tongue of fame !
Temper our grief with pride for those heroes bold.

Honour Isandula ! bury their bodies there ;
Thanks, Chard and Bromhead, who held Rorke's Drift so long ;
Give as a winding-sheet the colours to that pair,
Tell posterity their mighty acts in song.

THE LEGEND OF KUM-KUM.

THE LEGEND OF KUM-KUM.

I.

CHI-KUM-KUM was his name, a chan
Of the celestial land ; but he
Had drifted to the South, and ran
A life considerably free,
With folks who drank not much of tea.

II.

Beach-combers were amongst the friends
He cultivated, and, alas !
He never thought to make amends,
But let his sins as easy pass
As thistles to a hungry ass.

III.

He cursed, in English, horrid words,
Drank rum and gin like any sot ;
Blasphemed as natur'ly as birds
Do pipe their sweetest sylvan note,
For he'd a sweet and bird-like throat.

IV.

Ah me ! that man could thus forsake
His native tea, and poppy bliss,
The beds of rice, the bamboo brake,
And long-eyed Chinese maiden's kiss,
For such a wicked life as this.

V.

He scoured the main in many a craft
As cook, as diver, and decoy ;
And when a native fell he laughed
A gleesome laugh ; it was his joy
To cram the hold with coloured boy.

VI.

One day in Cooktown, as he loafed
Close to the wharf, a stranger said,
In accents singularly soft,
"You've worked, I think, the South Sea trade,
And are not easily afraid?"

VII.

"Afraid?" quoth Kum-kum, with a sneer
And string of horrid words. "You bet,
God and the devil would not skeer
This lilly chile. Give me a wet,
For I will not disgrace your set."

VIII.

This stranger, he was tall and dark
Most gentlemanly in his build,
And as he pointed to a bark,
Half yacht, half cutter, said, "She's filled,
With grub and liquor, and has tilled

IX.

"Through many a furrow bright and blue
In search of sport: I want a cook,
And from your shape I think you'll do—
To tell no tales, or play the rook,
To contradict me in my book."

X.

He took Kum-kum aboard, and brewed
A jorum stiff and strong enough
To make the strongest toper screwed;
But Kum-kum only grunted gruff,
"That's mighty squeamish sort of stuff."

XI.

The stranger took more youthful gin,
And mixed it with pure baby-rum.
"That ought to make a nigger grin,
It's warranted to kill at some
Five hundred yards." "It suits Kum-kum."

XII.

Kum-kum, he very soon agreed
To terms, as grog and grub were found
Ad lib., and he would never need
Of his good wage to spend a pound,
Besides a crew of Malays sound,

XIII.

Whose predilections since their youth
Had been to hack at naked necks,
And never tell a single truth,
Or let a magistrate them vex
When speaking of their doubtful wrecks.

XIV.

They were all boys whom he could trust,
Who could eat turtle thrice a week,
And make a case of brandy burst
Before they raised a single shriek,
Or ceased to turn the other cheek.

XV.

He'd known them take of bottles six,
Before their darkey blood was stirred,
Rough, new-made rum, and never mix
A drop of cocoa-milk to curd;
Then clear a village at the word.

XVI.

He knew them, with their bloodshot eyes,
And felt they'd have a jolly time,
For he that gentle boss could size,
And knew, in spite his soap and slime,
He'd wade neck-deep in gore and crime.

XVII

So tossing off his pannikin,
He laughed and said, "Where'er you're bound,
I'll sign your books, and be your man.
With grub and lic. like this all found,
I'll suit you, boss, down to the ground."

XVIII.

They sailed from Cooktown that same night,
And got beyond the coral reef,
Beneath the full moon's silent light,
Leaving the store-man wild with grief,
Calling their boss "a low-bred thief."

XIX.

They sailed away to islands fair,
And shipped their cargo free and bright,
Giving the sharks a lavish share,
Leaving behind the widows, dight
With ashes, wailing through the night.

XX.

That tall, dark skipper was a chap
Who never swore, and seldom spoke
Above his voice, nor cared a rap
For liquor or tobacco smoke,
Yet wore a look that seemed to mock

XXI.

These weaknesses in other men.
His coal-black eyes were dull and dim,
Unless in fight, and he would pen
In his log-book a pious hymn
Instead of drinking, and he'd trim

XXII.

His coal-black beard like any dude,
And cut and clean his filbert nails,
And never say a sentence rude;
But give his orders soft as snails
A-crawling o'er the country rails.

XXIII.

But if a Malay boy there thought
That he *was* soft 'cause of these ways,
God help that Malay boy! his lot
Was bad, and short his merry days
Before that sudden coal-black blaze.

XXIV.

Each night they drank themselves asleep
On deck, the skipper down below ;
Unless they had some work to keep
Them from their grog, he'd never slow
Their 'lowance, so that they could show

XXV.

No shaking when the moment came
To blaze their barkers, take their hand ;
He wanted tigers, cast no shame
On any boy how much he'd land :
His store was packed with every brand.

XXVI.

He was a curious kind of cove :
He did not seem to care for loot,
But had a pure, inherent love
To wipe off natives, branch and root ;
When that was done, he'd turn his foot

XXVII.

To pick up specimens,—a bird,
Or plant, or shell, were quite enough
To keep him hours without a word.
Like a museum in the rough
His cabin looked with pickled stuff.

XXVIII.

You'd thought, to see him sitting there
Working, or scribbling verse or prose,
He was a parson at his prayer,
Thinking on other people's woes,
As mild as milk in his repose.

XXIX.

But when the fight was on—by Saul!
The way he made that cutlass sound,
And fixed a billet for each ball
From his good Colts, it was profound,
And made even Kum-kum look around.

XXX.

In fact, this Chinese exile saw
All that he had gone through before
Was childhood's simple pranks : an awe
Crept through him at this depth of gore,
And he began to wish for shore.

XXXI.

A most unlucky state of mind,
With such a boss and such a crew,
For he grew sluggish and unkind
To that high-flavoured, lavish brew,
And spoilt, at times, their favourite stew.

XXXII.

His yellow face grew thin and lank,
His nose took on a purple bloom,
And day by day he slowly sank
Into a melancholic gloom,
Which marked him for an early tomb.

XXXIII.

At last, one night, the captain came
Upon him in his lonely state,
Suspicion in those eyes of flame,
And asked him, sternly, "what of late
Had come to spoil a worthy mate?"

XXXIV.

Kum-kum looked up with dull, dim gaze,
And sighed, "You pass each former pal,
I'm sick of all your pleasant ways—
You speak too mild, and wade too tall.
I want to leave you, and that's all.

XXXV.

"I'm ta'en a-thinking too of late
About Pekin, where I was got.
To kill these niggers out of hate
Seems fair, but for pure sport to pot
Them wholesale—no, I'd rather not.

XXXVI.

"At nights when I've been knocking round
Your cabin, heard you spout your lays,
I've felt a kind o' sorter bound
To try and mend my wicked ways,
Be good for my remaining days."

XXXVII.

The skipper's burning eyes grew mild
When he heard this, and then he purred,
Soft as a cat, "Come down, my child,
And hear some more : you have me stirred
With pathos for my written word."

XXXVIII.

They went below, the captain brewed
A jorum hot for poor Kum-kum ;
He next read words that sounded good,
And made him drink that sweetened rum—
'Twas mighty sweet and strong that rum.

XXXIX.

Both wept o'er sentiments so pure,
And vowed they'd lead a better life,
And swore their friendship would endure
Through life and death, through peace and strife;
Swore fealty both by hand and knife.

XL.

The captain brewed another glass,
And Kum-kum drained it to the dregs;
And then they pledged each absent lass,
And had a few more sweetened pegs,
Until poor Kum-kum lost his legs.

XLI.

Then rose the skipper from his seat,
And watched, with laughing eyes, his cook,
All squirming, snake-like, at his feet:
"A pound of arsenic has it took
To bring this Chinaman to book."

XLII.

He laughed a gleesome laugh each fling
Poor Kum-kum gave before he paid
His checks, and his sad ghost took wing.
Then in a jar he quickly made
That Chinaman to marmalade.

XLIII.

He soaked the corpse with good white wine,
And said, " He's worth preserving so.
A heathen whom the Muse divine
Could touch must not be sent below :
I'll carry him where'er I go."

XLIV.

Time passed, these rovers wandered far
Through many a conflict, many a gale ;
And with them sailed that well-packed jar
Of Chinese pickle, shrunk and pale.
At length they northward set each sail.

XLV.

A tempest rose, and drove them on
Past coral reefs and inky seas,
Until New Guinea's coast-line shone
With cocoa-nut and Mammy trees :
A pleasing view which did not please.

XLVI.

Their rudder gone, they drove ashore,
With yeasty fury in their wake,
Full on the rocks, where stood a score
Of natives, all prepared to take
From each wrecked Malay boy a steak.

XLVII.

The captain was the first to land,
And, finding that his tools were gone,
He tried palaver on that band,
Who listened to each dulcet tone,
As if they had been cut from stone.

XLVIII.

And then they trussed them up like geese
At Christmas time ; next made a fire,
And roasted them in their own grease,
While listening calm to curses dire
Before each victim did expire.

XLIX.

The captain, being soft and clean,
Was cooked and eaten first ; the rest
Were cut when done, and shared between
The women, kids, and casual guest
Who smelt the roast and to it pressed.

L.

All day they sat and ate roast beef,
And smacked their lips, and cleaned the bones ;
While that poor cutter came to grief,
And slowly broke upon the stones,
With crunching sides and dreary groans.

LI.

Next day the storm went down, and then
The skipper's samples came to light.
The natives, once more hungry men,
Grew joyful at the cheery sight
Of Kum-kum in his jar, air-tight.

LII.

They tested him just as he stood,
And found him tender, sweet, and strong ;
Then shared him round, pronounced him good,
Sucked up the wine which kept him long,
And danced awhile with laugh and song.

LIII.

Kum-kum, he had done many a crime
Of nameless horror while in life,
But never in his palmiest prime
Had he played havoc half so rife
As now he played on man and wife.

LIV.

The moon that night rose clear and bright,
And streamed upon a vanquished race ;
Each stiffened fist a bone clutched tight,
And on each drawn contorted face
A drunken leer marked their disgrace.

LV.

And sailors sailing o'er these seas
At times see, on that fertile strand,
A ghostly crowd amongst the trees,
With bone-like cudgel in each hand ;
While in the centre of that band

LVI.

A yellow, shrunken Chinese ghost,
All burning blue, like long-kept bait,
Scowls lividly upon the host,
And bares his teeth with devilish hate,
While round him they expectant wait.

A DYING PAINTER.

A DYING PAINTER.

FROZEN lanes, and brown leaves lying,
  Flecks in twilight skies chromatic—
There's an old spent painter dying
  In a stifling city attic.

Airy shapes, all rose and amber,
  Past the window panes each dances,
From a hundred cans they clamber—
  Vanish like his vanished chances.

Wake they dormant aspirations,
  Seem of lofty dreams the token?
Ah! he's dying of starvation,
  Past all dreams, that spirit broken.

Cutting blasts of chill September
Wing the damps from off the river,
Tear the heat from out each ember,
Make the cobwebs shake and shiver.

Lift the rags from off the painter,
Make the coming chills come faster,
Wailing down the alley, fainter,
Like the echoes of disaster.

* * * * *

Frozen lanes, and brown leaves lying,
Flecks in twilight skies chromatic—
What he might have been! now dying,
Lonely in that empty attic.

What he might have been, had fortune
Followed up her fair bespeaking;
When his hour was to importune
Favour—seize the laurel creeping.

What he might have been, had only
He the trick of imitation;
But the gods, who leave him lonely,
Gave that fatal gift—creation.

Gave him gifts that were not wanted ;
  Gave him modesty and meekness ;
So the brainless rose, and chaunted
  All their impudence and weakness.

So the brainless and the shameless,
  With the world behind them running,
Hath between them made him nameless,
  With his native gifts and cunning.

Slain the genius, killed the painter,
  Dried the palette all chromatic.
Twilight tints are growing fainter—
  Death is monarch of that attic.

THE SERVANT OF GOD.

THE SERVANT OF GOD.

IN THE MONASTERY.

ANNO DOMINI 1412.

AT THE SHRINE.

(LAY-BROTHER SIMON *alone.*)

I.

NOT for this life!—not for this life!
Oh, Jesus, who hath suffered all,
Lift up my soul from envy, strife—
I am not past recall.

Though I have writhed in deadly sin,
I still am young enough to slay
This evil self, and vict'ry win
O'er this vile tempted clay.

Oh, Jesus, Son of Mary pure,
Who died upon that cruel cross,
Help me to conquer, to endure
This life, and count it loss!

Oh, Mary, I am young and weak,
Yea—yea—all sinful to the core,
And yet by thorny paths I seek
God's purifying lore!

II.

What am I that I should decline
The cup my Saviour drank for me?
The cup of sorrow made divine
By God's all-just decree.

Earth-father, now no more, with her
Who bore me to this bitter vale,
Upon my armour lies a slur
While earth-love doth prevail.

The maiden whom I should have wed,
Had Christ not shown a better way,
May be consoled, when I am dead,
To man and light of day.

I loved her,—ah! she loved me true,
But Christ demands the sacrifice.
I have a duty stern to do,
So may not ponder twice.

Oh, father—mother—sister—maid,
My heart goes out to ye in woe!
Raise not regret, or else, betray'd,
My weak flesh may forego.

Jesus! I cry in pain to Thee,
My father—mother—love,
Set me from earth's affections free,
Console me with Thy love.

III.

The world—ah! yes, they tell me true,
It is a vapour,—love a snare;
Friendship a dagger, piercing through
The soul: peace lies in prayer.

I am by blood too weak to fight
The battle in the mart or plain;
Alone I wrestle through the night
With wishes fierce and vain.

Great God, now consecrate the life
Still left me; wash away my past,
Help me in wasteful hours of strife:
On Thee my sins I cast.

I, who came from a noble line,
Now gladly toil as simple slave,
A servant in Thy halls divine,
My best earth-gain the grave.

IV.

The sunbeams filter through the bars,
They lie cross-patched upon the floor.
Alone I stand, and Nature wars
For things to me no more.

I seem to fly upon those rays
Miles—miles, oft thought on, traversed miles:
I look upon a maiden's ways,
And bask me in her smiles.

'Twas I who made that thoughtful glance
Within those amber-tinted eyes,
Where only mischief seemed to dance
Before I woke deep sighs.

A lily in her fragile bloom,
The maiden blush-rose on her cheeks;
They tell me 'tis but for the tomb
That lust'rous clearness speaks.

Oh, amber eyes! oh, sun-kissed locks!
Up-clustering on that rounded brow,
On hopeless longings my heart rocks,
I half forget my vow.

V.

There is a painting of God's dame,
By Father Francis, he whose heart,
Before he saw the sin of Fame,
Lay in his noble art.

A picture painted for the shrine
Of our dear Lady, full of grace.
I love it with a love divine—
It bears a well-known face.

He was my friend in days of yore,
He is my teacher now in tears;
He saw her with me once, and bore
Her image through the years.

And here she stands, enshrined and high,
The spouse of God,—my soul's delight ;
I kneel and pray with moistened eye
By day and candle-light.

Seraphic languor in her air,
She gazeth downward, meek and mild.
My soul, uplifted, swims in prayer
To Mary and her Child.

Oh ! amber eyes, cast down and filled
With chastened rays of pensive love,
I look, and all my soul is thrilled
With fervour from above.

Oh ! sun-kissed tresses round that brow,
Within the circling disc of gold,
I pledge thee with a holy vow,
A love all grief-controlled.

I count the moments spent afar
From thy dear image, gracious Dame.
Ah, Virgin pure ! ah, ocean Star !
Distilling holy flame.

To be thy servant night and day,
I feel for earth no more desire;
I consecrate my soul and clay
To this all-living fire.

OUTSIDE THE CHAPEL.

ANNO DOMINI 1424.

(FATHER SIMON, *alone.*)

I.

THE moonbeams strike against the wall,
They lie cross-patched upon the floor;
I look like leper when they fall
Upon me by the door.

Here, waiting on the midnight bell,
Outside the Norman chapel door,
The foul fiend tempts my heart to dwell
On things to me no more.

I see my Lady in her bower,
I watch her by the garden wall;
She thinks that I have gone an hour;
The moon-rays on her fall.

She looks and thinks of me I know,
For I was blessed with virgin love,
I watch that moon-lit face of snow,
Like angel face above.

I breathe my tender serenade,
She starts, and knows that I am near,
And swiftly draws the blind, sweet maid,
With shy, discovered fear.

I meet my comrades, arm-in-arm ;
Thou, Brother Francis, wert among
Those merry boys, who used to charm
The night with wine and song.

Oh, jovial nights, ah, merry days,—
Ah, days and nights of deadly sin,
Before I was redeemed by grace,
Or God's love entered in.

The midnight bell peals deep and clear,
The devil flies before that sound ;
I kneel to Mary, and revere
God's consecrated ground.

IN THE CONFESSIONAL.

(FATHER FRANCIS AND BROTHER SIMON.)

I.

HOLD, Father Francis, I can tell
To thee all phases of my mind,
For thou hast felt thy soul rebel
With wishes undefined.

We may forge gyves upon the limbs,
And bind the body with a chain ;
But even within the sweetest hymns
There wail wild wails of pain.

My thoughts are vile, my thoughts are vile.
I find no hope in my resolve ;
The questions which I ask defile
E'er I dare sin absolve.

I fled the world and all its snares
To tread the path my Saviour trod,
And yet despite my tears and prayers
I am no nearer God.

I gave up Love for Love divine,
I fled the wassail and the brawl,
And yet Love haunts me at the shrine
Of Mary: oh! I fall.

I gaze upon that painted dame,
She bears the shape of her I left.
My prayers are blended with the flame
Of earth-hopes from me reft.

I fled the world and all its wiles
To seek the rest I cannot find;
The devil smiles, from Mary's smiles,
To devils in my mind.

Yea, penitents come in, and tell
Me sins—my own—I echo all.
My soul gets fouler stains of hell
In this confessional.

Was Lord Christ tempted like to me
Did He put questions as I must
To her charged with adultery
When He wrote on the dust?

Or did He not in pity pass
Her sins with one forgiving word?
To probe the sin-stained soul, alas!
Slays like a foeman's sword.

I fly the world, the world pursues,
I cannot leave the world behind;
I am all bruisèd as I bruise
Each sin-polluted mind.

WITHIN THE CELL. AFTER MASS.

(BROTHER SIMON *alone.*)

I.

ABSOLVED and clean, I meditate
On Him who died that I might rise
By penance to His high estate—
Earth's guiltless Sacrifice.

His body melts upon my tongue,
His purple blood runs in my veins.
O Lamb of God, for ever young,
Who bore all human stains!

What am I, that I should shrink back
From evil contact, if He bore
His cross along that thorny track,
Sad heart which patient bore?

Dwelling with sin, while yet all sin
Glanced off like water-drops from oil;
For never taint could enter in
That mind, or round it coil.

I cannot speak of sin, and keep
My soul all chaste in pure content,
For serpents come and sting my sleep
With dreams of vile intent.

II.

O Jesus! melting in my throat,
Thy flesh and blood is now my own,
All vile, all lustful, as I gloat
On thoughts to Thee unknown,—

Unless Thou knew'st that Magdalene
Was passing frail and passing fair,
Or felt a retrospect obscene
Waft o'er Thee like hot air;

When those long coils of silken mesh
Laved o'er Thy tear-washed quiv'ring feet,
And naked flesh touched naked flesh,
Those lips so soft and sweet.

Ah! if no pulse of passion stole
From those up-heaving breasts of grief,
Which touched Thy feet and touched Thy soul,
Making Thee feel like thief;

And when she whispered in those ears,
Though all divine, her evil life,
If Thou felt not the guilty fears
Wake in Thy heart fierce strife;

And if Thou didst not straightway see
The dainty harlot lying bare,
And in Thy heart divine a glee
Which triumphed over pray'r;

Then have I sinned the deadly sin,
For I have ta'en Thy flesh divine,
And blent it with foul thoughts within
This damnèd heart of mine.

III.

My back is seared with deadly strokes,
My flesh grows weaker day by day.
By fastings yet the devil mocks
At my self-tortured clay.

I fled the world, but here I know
That things are done by those ordained,
Which make the blood heart-backward flow
At God's sons so vile stained.

I walk the aisles with downcast eyes,
And strive my hardest not to see ;
And yet I know and sympathise
With red iniquity.

I strive to shut my ears to all
The whispers floating in the night ;
And yet I know and feel the thrall
By tremblings of delight.

I have not sinned in deed, and yet
I feel my vows no longer clean ;
My days are passed in mixed regret
And retrospects obscene.

IV.

Last eve I heard an evil jest
Told by a Brother Monk, which clung,
Like mud to cloth, within my breast.
All night a spirit sung

Within my brain the words to tune ;
My forced night words broke on the air,
And fouler jests joined in, and soon
Crushed out that feeble pray'r.

And yesterday a woman came,
Whom I had deemed so pure and high,
And whispered to my soul her shame
With lips, like mine, all dry.

"She loved me"—and even as she spoke
The hell-bred words, my evil mind
Leapt up responsive, and awoke
Desires I sought to bind.

I probed that weak heart to the core,
The woman shivered at my touch :
I asked base questions, she told more
In answer to my much.

I loved her with a guilty glance,
I knew that she was weak to me.
She lay within my hand, should chance
Grant opportunity.

And then I spoke the word of peace,
With arid tongue and husky tone ;
I gave the sinner her release,
But made her chains my own.

Absolved, yet, ah! no longer white,
These thoughts appal. Thy flesh divine
Hath now become as black as night
Since It hath blent with mine.

IN THE CELL. MIDNIGHT.

ANNO DOMINI 1436.

(FATHER SIMON *dying;* FATHER FRANCIS *sitting beside him.*)

I.

HUSH! hush! old friend, it was ordained ;
I *may* find perfect peace on high.
The world is passed, and I have gained
An hour of grace to die.

Wait they above—that maid, my friends?
'Tis kind to give me hope like this;
'Tis sweet to dream that mis'ry ends
With life,—that death means bliss.

But is it true? I know my love
Died broken-hearted, and for me;
But if she may be mine above,
Why not while here?—I see

A golden life all wasted here,
Two lives which might have blent as one,
Two hearts all crucified, and near
Me Mary's murdered Son.

God gave us life and warm desires,
We tried to crush them, all in vain;
For fastings cannot quench the fires
God lights, or loose earth's chain.

If I had died in bustling brawl,
I had not been by doubts assailed;
But proving much hath lost me all,
I strove for heaven, and failed.

II.

Hush! hush! old friend, I will confess
No more to man; I give my sins
To God,—the less you hear, the less
Of virtue Satan wins.

Thoughts spread like water rings revealed.
I never shrived the penitent
But all their sins, within me sealed,
Made sins of worse intent.

Thou know'st my life before we came—
'Twas ever careless, free and frank;
I never blushed at thought of shame,
I ne'er from danger shrank.

Ah, we were nearer heaven those days,
Thrice happy days of love and song,
When we rose up with hearts of grace,
And bodies plump and strong.

III.

It was a lie,—a snare of hell
Which struck us blind and turned our brains,
Making us seek God in the cell,
By fastings, tears, and pains.

We have destroyed our gifts, and sold
Our souls to hell with whip and nail,
Cutting the flesh, even as of old
Did those false priests of Baal.

I loved my kind, to woman knelt
As something to revere, before
I put on priestly frock, and spelt
The priestly craft and lore.

IV.

God! God! have I one comfort left?
I know not what or whose Thou art,
For all of faith in man is reft
From my accursèd heart.

I have destroyed my life, and now
On Death's black waves all aimless toss'd
Life's joys I bartered for a vow,
And this I count as lost.

I made an air-globe earth, and called
It Heaven, and for it gave up earth;
And now I toss with soul appalled
At horrors getting birth.

V.

Friend, friend, where art thou? Light hath pass'd,
I flung from me light, love and joy;
Now am I from all prospect cast,
Like tempest-beaten buoy.

Death—death, all hope, all future dead!
Is there a Heaven? I cannot tell.
Earth was the heaven from which I fled,
I made my heaven a hell.

VI.

Not for this life. What else is left?
O Jesus! didst Thou suffer all
To be at last, like me, bereft,
To wake when past recall?

Not all. I have not lost without
Some gain, the gain of sacrifice,
Sweet, sweet despite this fading doubt,
This breaking up of lies.

I have been tempted past my strength,
But still can die my maid's pure knight,
So that if we do meet at length,
She'll know I kept my plight.

And if we do not meet, 'tis still
A sweetness to be true and pure,
A holy joy to slay the will,
And God-like to endure.

True to our vows of earth, and true
To all we vowed at Mary's shrine,
I fold my hands, and wait my due
Content, without a sign.

VII.

Not for this life, and, if there be
No other life to sanctify,
This life is sanctified to me,
Despite this specious lie.

Thy hand, old friend ; the day grows dark
I had forgotten it was night.
I step on board a fragile bark,
Yet think I see a light.

Is it the dawning of the day
A-tween my prison-bars ? or is't
A light unseen to eyes of clay,
From skies where souls are blest ?

The shadows creep like doubts and fears
Aback before that light all grey,
And rolling up, are wasted years,
My heart beats young and gay.

Old friend—young friend, with black gown doffed,
A snowy gown is thine instead,
And all about thee and aloft
Are faces long since dead.

They come on rosy clouds all bright,
There is no grief—they all seem gay.
Was last night not a winter's night?
This is a summer's day.

[FATHER SIMON *dies.*

THE DEATH OF CLEOPATRA.

THE DEATH OF CLEOPATRA.

I.

WHAT is the Past? The sitting down a second,
And letting go the grip we have of care.
Then mem'ry wafts us, e'er we have it reckoned,
Away to scenes which Time makes soft and fair.

II.

Our dreams are thoughts which steal unfelt, while waking,
Into the passive mind and find a lair;
Until in sleep the soul starts up, and breaking
Its prison-bars, bids each guest come and share.

III.

The yellow moon rose from the east, and shining
Between the tendrils round our window frame,
Made a sweet picture, all of God's designing,
Painted on gold and hatched with silver flame.

IV.

Fell on two sweet eyes closed in balmy slumber,
As through rose-tinted portals stole sweet breath,
I clasped the yielding shape, each throb to number
And feel 'twas sleep, and not her sister, Death.

V.

Then on the moonlight, falling soft and mellow,
I gazed with closing eyes, till senses slipped
Away from thoughts of my own faultless fellow,
To her—no lovelier—whom dead kings had lipped.

VI.

The same light fell, but not as to me broken,
Fringes of palm, and fan-like papyrus leaves
Rose from the waters,—swung beside the token
Of man's industry, where the spider weaves.

VII.

Upon the polished granite pavement lying
The queen of many masters, and her last
Cold Death, and with the brooding daylight dying,
A crimson pall upon a black cloud cast.

VIII.

A broken drift, like wounded demons crushing
Above each other, with fierce battle spent,
And ruby streams, like thousand hearts out-gushing
Across the yellow of that twilight rent.

IX.

Vast temples, crumbling tokens of a nation
Now passed within the vault-like tomb of Time.
A mighty course decayed beyond salvation,
The spent refinements of dark lust and crime.

X.

Draped as they ought in gloom, the shadows slimy,
Where through the dripping palms the Nile appears,
Pool of the shambles, with its sides all grimy,
With marble fountains spurting bloody tears.

XI.

And in my sad dream stole a dirge of wailing,
Through scented groves and dusky corridors,
Low, like the night-winds from the river sailing
O'er stricken slaves and royal paramours:

XII.

"Light up the life-quenched limbs,
Heartless queen of night;
Lust hath fierce sobbed thy hymns,
Slaves have owned thy might.

XIII.

"Light, with thy cold, dead beams,
Love in its fatal sway;
Calm are the unknown dreams,
Passion spent and grey.

XIV.

"Light up the arms and breast
White as drifted snow,
Clasping all they loved best
In life's last mad glow.

XV.

"Light up the faultless face,
Hide the heart within,
Old, yet so filled with grace,
Not too old to sin.

XVI.

"Light up the proud, proud clay,
Proud, alas! for pride
That could the heart betray,
Ice cold at her side.

XVII.

"Light up the lips still red,
Hide the heart within;
This is her last love-bed,
Grown too old to win.

XVIII.

"Light up the matchless pair,
Hide the hearts within—
Hearts, false beyond compare,
Death hath cancelled sin."

XIX.

What is the lamp without its flame, though costly?
The palace with its mirth and music dead?
Both sepulchres, which beauty makes more ghostly,
And so the form, with its fair spirit fled.

XX.

Life is a spark, too fine for human testing,
It crouches in the centre of a sigh ;
It lights up hell, illumines heaven,—no resting,—
It is not born, how can it ever die ?

XXI.

A spark from some bright globe, eternal burning,
Which kindles in a brittle piece of clay,
And makes it lovely, till, its hour returning,
It leaves this lamp inanimate and grey.

XXII.

Love is the oil which feeds and burns it faster,
For whether it doth grovel or aspire,
It neither spares the delf or alabaster,
But breaks them both in its devouring fire.

FESTA SACARUM

FESTA SACARUM.

I.

THIS world is ever young to youth,
And manhood youth from wine may borrow.
I have a bas-relief, its story
Is, dancing nymphs with sinners hoary,
Satyrs and grapes, and mirth, forsooth
The whole is there, excepting sorrow.

II

Old age and youth are sculptured there ;
Young women nude and eye-entrancing ;
Goat-feeted satyrs, ever filling
The golden cups upheld, and spilling
Grape-juice, blood-red, o'er white limbs bare,
While locks are tangled with the dancing.

III.

Wild laughter rings through summer skies,
Sacarum festa they are keeping;—
The scarlet poppies by them springing
Shake with the dancing and the singing.
Summer to-day, and summer flies;
Laughter to-day, but when the weeping?

IV.

Those laughing nymphs are always young,
They disappear when youth is over,
And other nymphs, with merry faces,
Step o'er the withered to their places;
The dance is danced, the song is sung
By bloated sage and wanton lover.

V.

Two thousand years ago the same
As we to-day in lane or city—
Sacarum festa bosoms firing,
Not woke to feelings, yet aspiring
To worship at the shrine of shame,
Those merry nymphs who know not pity.

VI.

Fair maidens, shrinking out of sight,
Come to the dance with garments clinging ;
Shy at the first, with blushes burning,
But resolute—there's no returning.
Soon stand they naked in the light,
And join the loudest in the singing.

VII.

And then they whirl about the maze,
Too quick for much of supervision ;
Grow lovelier each moment passing,
Grow ripe and full within the massing,
Then slowly fade before the gaze,
And pass from sight and recognition.

VIII.

But old Silenus and his crew
Dance on—drink on the same as ever ;
Cover the corses with red roses.
All putrid wafts the nostril loses
In rich perfume, in purple dew,
And poison draughts through bosoms quiver

IX.

They dance on flowers, on hearts, on heads,
Pink feet quash into leprous sorrow,
Lithe limbs are soused with blood, the satin
And dimpled arms on dead limbs batten,
Adders lie coiled within love-beds,
Laughter to-day—and death to-morrow.

LIBERTY.

LIBERTY.

I.

DEATH, the liberator,
Comes to wish her joy;
In his little coffin
Lies her infant toy.

II.

Death, the liberator,
Breaks her brittle chain,
Bids her don her mantle
For the streets again.

III.

'Tis a wretched garret
For this gay attire,
With its broken table
And the cinder fire.

IV.

With its filth and tokens
Of the life of riot,
And this hopeless mother
Crying there so quiet.

V.

With the hag who comforts,
As she sips her drink
From the broken tea-cup,
Bleary eyes that blink.

VI.

With the friend who pauses
O'er the braid of hair,
Touching cheeks chalk-powdered
For the midnight glare.

VII.

With that tarnished fragment,
Doubling tress of gold,
False as are the roses
Yet in paper fold.

VIII.

With the furs and laces
Draggling from the chair,
And those dimpled shoulders
Scarred with kicks, and bare.

IX.

What a strange weird medley,
Fit alone for Death,
That lean, whimp'ring pander,
With her brandy breath.

X.

And the hopeless mother,
Who may weep awhile,
But before the midnight
Must dress up to smile.

XI.

With her face now hidden
In her shortgowned sleeve,
When she shrieks with laughter,
Who will this believe?

XII.

See her ebon tresses
  Trailing from the coil,
And she quietly crying,
  Crying all the while.

INNOCENCE.

INNOCENCE.

I.

THE rushlight leapt up with a flare,
Then it dropped to the foot of its bottle,
And, flinging its spirit to air
In a fume of rank reek,
That floats upward to seek
A fresh spot in the midst of the mottle—

II.

It showed an old four-posted bed,
From the night sales and brokers imported ;
Two soap-boxes raised up instead
Of a table, and here
A cracked jug for the beer,
And a chair on three legs, wall supported.

III.

It showed ancient sin by the grate,
Huddled down, with her pipe, on the fender,
The fire near as dull as her hate,
Which outlived all the rest
Of the snakes in her breast,
And helped in their passage to rend her.

IV.

The ashes are all that remain
In the pipe, in the grate, in the woman—
The ashes and some of the pain
That fight down the frost
With the heat not yet lost,
Though they've lost all once glowing and human.

V.

It showed up her dirt, and her hair,
Rusty-grey, falling lank on her shoulder,
Her skin, where the rents leave it bare,
Like her face, seamed and old,
Pinched with want, blue with cold,
Like a mummy amongst all its moulder.

VI.

It lit up the child at her feet,
And shone o'er the ringlets like metal;
The features, though impish, are sweet,
Resting there on the bags,
Gleaming out of her rags
Like a half-withered white rose's petal.

VII.

She slumbers, this infant of shame,
Her thin puckered lips almost smiling;
Caught, just as she left off her game,
The ham-shank lying by,
And the tears not quite dry,
Glist'ning dew-like through smears of defiling.

VIII.

Her clenched dirty fist o'er her head,
And her murmurs, the filth of the gutters,
By her—'tis a prayer that is said;
The best words she hath known,
All the truth is her own,
Angel-tears purify what she utters.

IX.

The night winds are hushed, for the birth
Of the day—not yet come—which is coming;
This waiting hangs over the earth,
A faint pallor of ash
Steals beyond the black sash,
And the feelings are growing benumbing.

X.

A thud 'gainst the side of the stair,
Four staggering feet on the landing,
A smash and a gust of cold air,
While the hush of the morn
Is all ruthlessly torn
By the partners in vice who are standing.

XI.

Ancient sin never moves from her seat,
And the stars outside steadfastly glisten;
They pour out more drink, and repeat
All the pranks of the night
With coarse jests that delight,
While poor Innocence wakes up to listen.

LOVE: AN IDYL.

LOVE: AN IDYL.

I.

SHE is in her dirty short gown,
He in ragged corduroys—
Idle, vicious waifs about town,
Sorrows real—phantom joys.

II.

She sells fish when not too lazy,
Relics rest upon her still;
In his mind some notions hazy
Lurk about his work and will.

III.

She can boast a kind of beauty,
Wild and tawny, with a creed
Born of love, and fear, and duty;
He hath nothing saving greed.

IV.

She is faithful in her treason :
That which makes the jealous hate,
Never touched them, for the reason
Custom made legitimate.

V.

Virtue, as *we* comprehend it,
Was not virtue in their sight ;
What *she* won was *his* to spend it ;—
It is training makes a right.

VI.

Where she went, or *how* she gained it,
Never troubled either heart,
If no other *fancy* stained it,
While she acted up her part.

VII.

Kicks and curses were the token
Of the union they had made ;
Words endearing were not spoken
Kisses are her stock-in-trade.

VIII.

What to her the honeyed speeches?
Men are fools to be betrayed;
She is of the tribe of leeches,
Honest in her style, if paid.

IX.

Once a week she takes her chiding
From the priest, and at the shrine
Kneels to Mary, nothing hiding,
Pardon gets, and flesh divine.

X.

Gleans some comfort from this duty,
Love grows softer for the day;
Feelings vaguely dawn, that beauty
Was not given to pawn away.

XI.

Love is purged from filthy lucre,
Weaves new meshes in her heart;
Thoughts to raise the beast who took her
To another, manlier part.

XII.

Never once a thought to leave him ;
Dog-love is the love she knows.
Beast—ah ! worse, she could not grieve him
With a shadow of her woes.

XIII.

Christ, O Christ ! whom saints are greeting,
As You hang limp on Your cross,
Priest and people all repeating,
Know they not the gain or loss ?

XIV.

Christ ! O Christ of earth, or fiction,
Christ of all, or Christ of none,
What has been Your predilection,
Wealth or woe, sad Mary's Son ?

XV.

Christ ! O Christ of sight or hearing,
As You were, or as You are,
With decorum softly sneering,
Or set high decorum's star ?—

XVI.

Christ, my Christ, the Friend of sinners,
With Your rags, and want, and woe,
You were never with the winners,
Ever with the vile and low.

XVII.

Absolution, 'tis a fable :
They must wed, or she must part ;
But she knows she is not able,
And her beast hath not the heart.

XVIII.

So she loves, and lives, and mingles
Sin and prayer and wishes, through
Ice-cold crime, fond yearnings,—tingles,
Of a woman fresh and true.

XIX.

She is in her dirty short gown,
He in ragged corduroys :
Idle, vicious waifs about town,
Sorrows real—phantom joys.

OCTOBER: A MONOLOGUE.

OCTOBER: A MONOLOGUE.

I.

SOUGH! the blasts of chill October,
When red leaves are dripping down
In the country. Drunk or sober
Women, hungry, hawk the town;
Money and men, through close and pen,
Drink, a thousand cares to drown.

II.

What would you have, my pure white choker?
Give me a copper or two for luck.
Tracts to a woman like me, you mocker!
Think you a tract will do for chuck?
Have you a name for a curse, a shame?
What would you do with a pack of muck?

III

I have been honest—have you?—and tender?
I am a woman, cast out, and more:
I am a wrecker, a snare, a sender
Down to perdition, a rocky shore.
Wages of hell for the wares I sell:
What is the son that your mother bore?

IV.

Had I a quarter your yearly wages
I could be honest with perfect ease,
Argue this question with well-fed sages,
Wonder at sin o'er my wine and cheese;
Easy to pray for our bread to-day,
Easy to pardon on terms like these.

V.

I am a nuisance, a blight to banish
Out of the living and into the grave:
Give me a stipend, and I will vanish—
Not out of taste do I tread the pave;
Women must eat, though they walk the street—
Can you suggest a way to save?

VI.

Give us the work, with the wage sufficient ;
  Give us a home where we may feel free :
Not with the hard matron-eye omniscient,
  Watching for ever our faults to see.
How can you think we could give up drink
  All of a moment. Could you?—less me.

VII.

Give us the chance, with the time to do it ;
  Give us a tether to come and go :
Cover us up when we fall and rue it ;—
  Pity should cover both sin and woe.
Give us more grace the more we are base,
  Then may we hope to get out of the slough.

THE TOY.

THE TOY.

I AM but as a pebble in his way,
Pretty to look at for a little while,
To be uplifted and tossed up in play,
To fondle with an absent trifling smile.

But what is he to me—a god, a ray?
I lie within his reach and feel now vile—
He has my all, I cannot say him nay:
I live upon his bounty and his smile.

My heart lies bleeding while I seem all gay,
I laugh because he likes it; but the guile
Leaves me with morn: I weep and shrink from day,
For now my light comes only from his smile.

I wonder much if now stone dead I lay,
All snowy clad on that blue velvet pile,
If he would look with eyes as far away,
And fondle my dead face with that same smile?

THE LAMENT OF TINTORET.

THE LAMENT OF TINTORET.

I.

IT is not wrath for selfish wrong which moves
My soul with this great agony.
The buffet on the stiffened corpse but proves
It past revenge, downflung and left to lie:
But to the mindless mole now buffeting,
My soul is drawn with human sympathy.
Fain would I wake them, as, with broken wing,
I moan the sorrow that I cannot sing,
And vainly beat the ground before I die.

II.

Oh, soul of Truth, down-trodden in the mire!
Oh, soul of Life, crushed in that iron cage!
Oh, light, oh, liberty and vain desire!
How hath thy Death been paid by sordid wage!

I rise, and with my yearning wishes fling
Words incoherent, with impotent rage :
Art-soul which beats the earth with broken wing ;
Life-soul which moans when men would have thee sing ;
Truth-soul which men with falsehood now would gauge.

III.

Thou crucified and outraged soul of Christ,
How have thy brows been torn by mocking spite !
Harlots, who made in loathsome dens a tryst,
To shear the glory from this God of Light,
Time-stains unto the sun-shafts do they bring,
And call this darkness which they have devised
" The light of Liberty," and softly sing
While Liberty beats out her broken wing,
And moans the death-dirge of that stricken night.

IV.

Harlots, who drape their sterile shapes in gold,
Damaskened with the blanchèd blue and grey,
Lying in shadows, with the bodies cold,
Of victims, while sweet strings they tuneless play :

Shadows filled out with shapeless things which
swing
In saddened sympathy with dying day:
Drowning the beating of that broken wing,
Calling it life, the death-dirge which they sing,
And love, while they are dreaming of their pay.

V.

Is it all vain that I must toil and weep,
And feel the life-blood surge within my brain?
Are men content to lull themselves asleep?
Become as women, letting out for gain?
Are those pangs futile which my vitals wring?
The scorn—the shame—the poverty and pain—
Lost to the music of that beating wing?—
I hear the wailing even as now I sing,
Like that weird sound before the march of Rain.

VI.

Prognostic of my fate—Defeat and scorn,
An hour of blackness with the veil down-rent;
While thieves are gambling on the vestments torn,
And Pharisees are mouthing malice spent.

Gall mixed with vinegar they to me bring,
But I have done my work, so die content.
Truth cannot die—Time cures that broken wing.
Time be the judge with me, and those who sing
The death-song of the heart they've crushed and bent.

VII.

Time be my resurrection. Thus I leave
Within the hollow of Thy mighty hand
My art—my fame, the sorrows which now grieve.
Right me where I am wronged, and let me stand
A man, and not the shadow of a thing
Which I am made before that rabid band.
My clay is conquered, yet on deathless wing
My soul will hover near, and ever sing
Love, Love, for all the dwellers of the land.

WINTER.

WINTER.

HUSH!—the year's first snow is falling,
Lightly floating to the ground;
Blurring out the moon's grey pallor,
Breaking through its halo round;
Showing dark against the centre,
Showing white against the dark,
Piling up on pole and window,
Leaving everywhere its mark.

Draw the blind up, let the mellow
Lamplight flow from out the room.
Heat the ghastly face outside there
Peering through the moving gloom;
Let her feast her hungry senses
On the comforts that she sees,
Leaning o'er the railing, sickened,
Till her thoughts and fingers freeze.

Touch the keys of your piano,
Lovely lady, richly clad ;
Send the silver of your trained voice
Mocking to that heart half-mad.
Listen ! to the voice cajoling,
Thrill with mingled love and pride ;
She hath known as much as you can
Of the lover at your side.

Stagger onward, heart of anguish,
He has sins enough to damn
Half a city ; get your money
As you may, and buy your dram.
Plunge to depths below the plumming—
He is viler far than you,
With his soft brown eyes appealing
To those trusting eyes of blue.

* * * *

See the first pure flakes of winter
Settling down on hill and dale,
Melting in the gleaming river
Where the scattered branches trail ;
Settling down on each projection,
Touching up each broken saint
Of the time-stained rich old Abbey,
With its carvings rude and quaint.

Spreading out a spotless crumbcloth
O'er the soft green velvet pile,
O'er the slabs and built-up fragments
In that roofless mighty aisle ;
With the moonbeams playing softly
Over windows, tomb, and niche,
Blending form and space so subtly,
That we know not which is which.

* * * *

From the woodman's thatch-roofed cottage
Comes a gleam of tawny light
From the candle on the table
And the log-fire flaring bright ;
And within, the dainty clearness
Of the linen on the bed,
Where the grandame weeps in silence
By her absent daughter's—dead.

Where the pine trees and the larches
Gather up the deepest shades,
And, between, are soft grey patches
Traced upon the root-laced glades—
Toils the aged, broken woodman,
Looming where the trees grow plain,
Seeking in his labour, prolonged,
Surcease from his nightly pain.

There's a wealth of blending colour
  Drifting on the chilling air,
From the brown-stained walls and rafters
  And the homely cottage ware ;
From the gaudy gown of cotton
  Lighting up the sombre shade,
And the kettle drowsy humming,
  And the sleeping collie laid.

Comfort here as when the maiden
  Grew to gloom upon the whole ;
Grew to long for unknown pleasures
  With a greedy, narrow soul ;
Grew accustomed to the whisper
  That affrighted her at first ;
Grew to wish to hear it further,
  With a rank and morbid thirst.

Comfort, as when fled the woman
  With her inner load of shame ;
And her father and her mother
  Heard, with crouching heads, her name ;
When black news came from the city
  Of her velvets and her gold,
Then they knew there was no comfort
  Save beneath the churchyard mould.

When she came with gaudy trappings,
Brazen with her nameless child,
Leaving in that lowly cottage
Her sole remnant undefiled.
Sinned against—but not yet sinning—
Martyr to the parent's crime ;
Noble little martyr, dying
Every hour, a death sublime.

That heroic heart is quieted,
And the soul hath found its place,
And the snow is scarcely whiter
Than the little withered face ;
And the flakes are filling lightly
All the miles that lie between
That soot-grimed and vice-steeped city
And that cottage on the green.

* * * *

Twelve tolls muffled from the steeple—
And even love must end the lay—
One fond clasp within the lobby
And his footprints trail away ;
While she stands within the lintel
Kissed by snow-elves on the brow,
Melting into tears of pity
For her pure and heart-won vow.

Passing on, he makes a circuit
From the mire-bespattered skirt
Of the woman in the gutter,
Lying drunk and smashed and hurt.
Passing on, he merely glances,
Thinks he's seen the face before,
Chance some gleaner of his wild oats,—
He could count them by the score.

Passes on into his chamber,
Sinks into his easy chair,
Lights his pipe, and there, self-righteous
Builds fond castles in the air ;
While his victim in the gutter,
With pollution in her breath—
Mire-bedraggled, cut in falling,
Senseless lies, and bleeds to death.

* * * *

Lo ! the year's first snow has fallen,
And the moon shines clearly down
All the snow-clouds, torn asunder,
Gather round a golden crown.
With the zigzag rents and edges,
And the umber blended blue,
Spread behind the violet masses,
Where dilated stars look through.

It is hard and clear and biting,
Makes grey tresses of the brown,
Stiffens out each hair like wire-work,
Sends the robins into town,
Where, beneath the eaves, they shiver,
All their dusk-red bosoms stained,
Getting sorry food and shelter,
Losing more than they have gained.

Like bright diamond dust on ermine,
Precious crystalled powder, strewn
On the hedges, lanes, and meadows,
Glist'ning pale 'neath stars and moon.
Like soiled linen grimed and smutty,
Trampled slush 'neath myriad feet,
Hanging o'er grey slates, desponding,
Dropping limp upon the street.

In the country winter kings it,
In the town he hangs his head ;
In the country he is royal,
In the town an Arab bred ;
In the country cheeks like roses,
In the town gaunt, hungry, white ;
I am in the country happy,
I was in the town last night.

MAMMON!

MAMMON!

I PONDER by day and by night
On the gods of this world of hate ;
The greatest had never the might
Of fat, greasy Mammon, the great.
He sits on his glittering throne,
And blinks with his jaundicey eyes ;
All the earth spread around him his own,
And he claims the best half of the skies.

They say 'mongst his devotees Rome
Hath honoured him more than the lave ;
But I think we may look nearer home
For as true and as loving a slave.
The portionless maid may be fair,
And the hag may be withered and old ;
The minister leans to the elderly ware,
Her youth is renewed in her gold.

"All the rivers run into the sea,
And the sun rises up from the east";
Death comes whatever, wherever we be,
Though we hunger or whether we feast.
And what has man of his hands,—
And what is the beauty of gold,
The cattle, the servants, the lands,
When they hurry him under the mould?

Is he of a much different shape,
Since his father hath left him his grounds,
That they humble, and honour and ape
All the tricks of his shillings and pounds?
Is youth but a thing to be bought,
And manhood a toy to be sold,
And the rake to be clasped in spite of his rot,
And the harlot made pure with her gold?

Oh, beauty, pride, talent, and health,
Oh, innocence, what is your price?
The virtue unbacked by the pelf
Is not worth the thinking of twice.
What brain can be dull when 'tis cased
In such a respectable fold?
The wit grows the finer thus graced,
We must laugh at the chink of the gold.

I stand on the brink of the crowd,
I sneer as I look at them bow,
I blush for the time I have bowed ;
And is it all pride holds me now?
I see all the vileness about ;
Yet what can I say for myself,
With all this wild tumult of doubt,
This hankering after the pelf?

I fain would plant tightly my hat
On its place when I see others bare ;
Fain stand when I see others squat,
And kick out when kicking is fair.
I think human nature revolts,
But policy tells me to hold ;
My stomach the humble pie bolts,—
I own thee my Master, great gold.

SANCT AGNES.

SANCT AGNES.

BUILD for her an altar window,
Rich with gems of colour chaste,
Blending all that's pure and lovely,
So that worshippers may taste
Something of the fascination
That her beauty spreads about,
For that beauty is religious ;—
Sacrilege it were to doubt.

She recalls the apple-blossom,
White and soft carnations blent ;
She recalls the morning sunbeam
Drawing forth the dew-washed scent,
And we bend our heads in token
Of the angels passing by,
When we see within her eyelids
Sapphire gleams of summer sky.

Cut her image out of marble,
Crown her with a softened gleam,
Carve her features all perfection,
Like the features of a dream.
Crown her only with her tresses,
Clothe her only with her grace,
Gaze up to her as some planet
Gleaming out of upper space.

Put her with all fair ideals
In a niche and in a shrine,
Love her as we love the moonlight—
As we should love things divine.
Build for her an altar window,
Bathing splendour as it flows;
Love with trembling fair Sanct Agnes,
Calm and pure as meltless snows.

COLOUR STUDY: THE RISING MOON.

COLOUR STUDY: THE RISING MOON.

SHE peers above her nest of clouds,
  Soft, silv'ry, grey, and amber ;
Tipping with lemon edge the shrouds
  O'er which she has to clamber ;
While far above her overspreads
  A drifting sea of yellow,
With interspersing mauve laid beds,
  And salmon fringes mellow.
She looks a fair bride, with her brow
  Incased with silver fretwork ;
And like a weeping widow now
  Veiled in her inky network.

* * * *

Sail on, fair queen, and trail thy train
  Of burnish o'er the ocean,

Thou layest upon this heart a pain,
An undefined emotion.
Upon Thee sombre shadows wait,
Behind the dusk clouds dying ;
The lapping wavelets languid prate,
At sea grey boats are lying.
The lighthouse gleams a moment spark
That darts adown the ripples,
Then leaves thee mistress of the dark,
All flecked with golden stipples.

THE MOSS LAND.

THE MOSS LAND.

I.

I CANNOT reach the stars,
But I can find a shade
Beneath this moss-tree glade,
Away from mortal jars.

II.

I emulate the mites,
And with them sympathise,
And borrow their sharp eyes,
And climb their dizzy heights.

III.

Our world, this crack is all,
Each speck of earth hath grown
A most stupendous stone ;
Eternity this wall.

IV.

The heart which cannot fly
May surely learn to crawl ;
Grow, like its neighbours, small,
Or rule a lesser fry.

V.

Here do I wear the crown,
My kingdom half an ell ;
My subjects ne'er rebel,
For I could knock them down.

VI.

We are a cultured band,
We fight, and steal, and slay ;
All justice pawn away,
Like any larger band.

VII.

We love, and fear, and hate,
And cheat, and lie as neat
As if we grew six feet,
And lived in court and state.

VIII.

The Alps are but ant-hills
To angel eyes, I ween ;
Each speck of moss so green
A forest densely fills.

IX.

There is no form, or size,
There is no test of hue ;
The truth to me—to you
Is all a pack of lies.

X.

Time is an idle tale,
The stone-cased frog is young ;
The midge his hour has sung,
Grows old—grows stiff and frail.

A FORENOON EFFECT: BORDER-LAND.

A FORENOON EFFECT: BORDERLAND.

I.

FAR in distance trembling ether, faintly blue and misty grey,
Filled with softened undulations and mild lights, which sunny play.
Shafting from the mid-infinite, striking on the upturned sides
Of the crouching herd of cloudlets which along the blue plain rides.

II.

In the middle distance yellow, purple, red, and blue and brown.
Bathed in shadow broad and simple, from the darkened flanks cast down.

Forests, fields, and lanes partaking of the dreamy
morning rest,
All their local tints appearing only to the eye in
quest.

III.

In the foreground, starting boldly, blades of grass
and lichen cold,
Crimson dockens, snowy daisies, with their rounded
breasts of gold ;
Tangled tufts of purple heather, thistles, buttercups
and bells
Waft away to indistinctness, middle space and
further fells.

SPRING SHOWERS.

SPRING SHOWERS.

I.

DRIP upon the window sill,
Splash upon the river ;
Blend the many shades, until
Flames they cross and quiver.

II.

Drip upon the yellow broom,
Mix the red and ochre.
Spring is here with softest bloom :
Painters only mock her.

III.

Drip upon the blossom white,
Splash on darkened ledges,
Change to silver, golden light,
Break and blur the edges.

IV.

Drip upon the broken wall,
Run from off the steeple;
Cleanse the roofs and pavements all,
Never mind the people.

V.

Fill the miles to yonder spire
With heaven's own designing,
Folds of grey, o'er gleams of fire,
Gleams through grey defining.

VI.

Drip from that immensity,
Splash upon the river;
Change the earth to one vast sea,
Sparkle, change for ever.

A MISTY TWILIGHT.

A MISTY TWILIGHT

I.

THE sun has set an hour ago,
And all the west is growing cold ;
But yet retains a ghostly glow,
And mellow grey that once was gold.

II

And golden still it seems away
Behind yon purple bank of clouds,
Which is less purple than soft grey
Behind the denser mountain shrouds.

III.

Up where the amber blends with blue,—
Or would-be blue, if eye could catch,
Through that fine change, so harsh a hue,
Bright stars are coming out to watch.

IV.

One after one they pierce the space,
And let us know how deep the tone
Of greyling on that dying face,
Which hangs above us pale and lone.

V.

The hills are grey, and in the vale
Long lines of silver vapour spread,
On which dark tree-tops seem to sail
Like barges o'er a lake's smooth bed.

VI

A gauzy pall, which creeps along,
Dividing dun from bronzy range;
Uncertain mid-space all athrong,
Shapes coming close with scarce a change.

VII.

Until upon the dark moorland
The tints are waxing more distinct,
A pathway, like an iron band,
From which the vapours seem to shrink.

VIII.

A sedgy moss where waters blend
With russet-heath and madder-peat ;
A moor and path without an end,
Where heather blows and rushes meet.

IX.

The sun hath set an hour ago,
And in the east the yellow moon
Uplifts her from the masses slow,
Swimming a vast grey-brown lagoon.

X.

There is no shadow in her tracks,
Her lustre is all self-contained ;
A silver trail between the cracks,
A double moon where oze hath stained.

XI.

A paler side upon the stone,
Too tender for the touch of art,
Where I am sitting still alone,
With trembling flame within my heart.

XII.

An instinct that the night is mine
But for a happy moment more,
And then from out that misty shrine
A lithesome shape—my watch is o'er.

ON STYLE.

ON STYLE.

I.

TOUCH your lights with lemon,
Sharp as light can be;
Heed not man or woman,
Go with spirit free.

II.

Nature is your preacher,
Take her mighty style.
What is other teacher?
Fashion for awhile.

III.

Men are schoolboys spelling
Tasks the mother gave.
All this buying—selling,
Count to deck a grave.

IV.

God hath given us samples,
  Man hath ground us paints.
Ho! the fool who tramples!
  Hah! the cur that faints.

THE TANGLED SKEIN.

THE TANGLED SKEIN.

I HAVE caught a thread from a tangled skein,
Let me wind it as far as 'twill go ;
I would gather it up with the knots between—
Wind it tenderly, wind it slow.

Two eyes the shade of two eyes long dim,
Two lips like a pair I have kiss'd ;
The same calm hour, and that same sweet hymn,
Waft my soul to choirs of the bless'd.

It is good to pick up old scenes like these,
Though the thread may break off too soon ;
It is good to remember the cooling breeze,
In the world's hot, parching noon.

It is good to be young when we can, if we can—
See the days when our leaves were green;
Come back to our virgin faith in man,
And wind out the tangled skein.

WARK CASTLE.

WARK CASTLE.

A TWILIGHT IMPROMPTU STUDY.

A BROKEN wall on the face of the hill,
The smoke from the village melting;
Red tiles and thatch, with a violet thrill
From the amber cornfield belting;
A star in the blue lift quivering white,
And this is the picture of Wark to-night.

THE END.

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